

Communication Tips for Superintendents

Preparing for the release of AYP

Anticipate questions your parents, teachers, school board members, community leaders and local media will ask about your school's performance. Talk with district communications professionals about specific key messages for your district **BEFORE** you get media calls.

A note about language

When speaking with parents, community members and the media, remember that **THERE ARE NO FAILING SCHOOLS**. This is NOT official language being used by anyone at the state or federal level, and every effort needs to be made to correct the use of this language by other educators, members of the media, community leaders and parents. The schools "on the list" are those "in need of improvement." Do not repeat the term "failing schools" back in responses to questions about "failing schools;" this reinforces the negative language.

What you should know about your district results:

1. Exactly which (if any) school buildings in your district did not make AYP.
2. How many years in a row did each building not make AYP and in which content areas (reading/math) and for which student subgroups.
3. The required actions necessary for each building.
4. A general knowledge of the current school improvement initiatives going on at each school on the school improvement list.
5. A list of at least 3 strengths for each school on the school improvement list.

Consider the following in preparing for media attention related to AYP:

- Remember that extensive media coverage of the WASL score release will be inevitable, given this is the first year all schools and districts are held accountable under the new federal law.
- The media will most likely contact school districts with a high number of schools not making AYP, or they will contact districts with very few or no buildings on the list. Try to avoid commenting on the performance of other schools or districts.

- Avoid making excuses or comparisons to other districts. Stay focused on your plan for improving student learning and addressing areas of weaknesses as indicated by your WASL scores.
- Talk to reporters when they call. Remember that they have a job to do, but use the opportunity to explain to the media and your community about the opportunities and challenges NCLB presents.

Be sure to note:

1. The new federal law requires **all** students reach higher performance levels on statewide, large scale assessments.
2. Both the state and federal education laws emphasize equal and high achievement for all. Under NCLB, all schools and districts must eliminate achievement gaps. This is absolutely in-line with Washington state's commitment to high standards. While it is an ambitious goal, it is the right goal.
3. Every state is required to define its own standards, testing requirements and AYP targets within strict criteria that must be approved by the federal government. Washington will continue to use its own state standards and assessments.
4. Adequate Yearly Progress will help us further target schools that are in need of assistance.
5. As with any new legislation that is sweeping and complex, we have confidence that continued adjustments and refinements will be made to the new federal law in some areas that still remain unclear, including requirements for special needs students and English Language Learners.
6. AYP reports are one more added source of information to provide a more complete picture of student learning.
7. We intend to make progress – not excuses – but we need resources, particularly in under-performing schools, to overcome challenges.
8. We invite the media, parents and the community to visit our schools and see what our students are learning. And we encourage them to work with us as we continually improve our schools.